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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KMPI](#) [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE Information Minister Reviewing Press Law

Ref: Abu Dhabi 158

11. (U) UAE Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed (AbZ) has called for an amendment to the existing Press and Publication Law to protect press freedom and to prevent harassment of journalists. The Ministry of Information and the UAE Journalists Association are jointly submitting suggestions for modifying the law, according to the March 10 "Gulf News". "The aim is to create a regulation capable of protecting the freedom of the press and shielding journalists from being prosecuted under the penal law," association chairman Mohammed Yousuf said.

12. (U) The issue surfaced a few days after the government ordered two journalists from Arabic "Al Ittihad" to appear in an Abu Dhabi court in a libel case brought against them by a government official. Under the press law, journalists could face imprisonment if convicted of libel, a penalty the Journalists Association considers too harsh. Yousuf said his association also wants to address the fact that journalists can face legal action based on the penal code.

13. (SBU) Journalist contacts told Pol Chief that UAE newsrooms like the fact that AbZ is promoting openness, although journalists are careful not to offend ruling family members. "I write what I want," said Mohammed Al Hammadi, Arabic "Al Ittihad's" domestic affairs editor and the author of a weekly column that raises controversial issues. "It is OK to criticize up to a point," said Abdulraheem Al Bateeh, an editor/anchor with Abu Dhabi TV.

14. (U) In January, AbZ called for a re-assessment of the legal framework within which the Arab media operates (see reftel), stating, "What is required is legislation that guarantees free access to information." He cited the first step in comprehensive media reform as the "emancipation" of

the media from laws confining it. The media should be able to criticize the government and question its policies.

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